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To: Greg Fife [gregfife@tx.rr.com]
Subject: EXCLUSIVE: Gert Town residents possibly exposed to dangerous levels of radium, EPA memo shows

<https://www.fox8live.com/2019/07/17/exclusive-epa-memo-shows-gert-town-residents-possibly-exposed-dangerous-levels-radium/>

EXCLUSIVE: Gert Town residents possibly exposed to dangerous levels of radium, EPA memo shows

Kimberly Curth

NEW ORLEANS, La. (WVUE) - Gert Town residents faced exposure to high levels of radiation due to material lying underneath their street, according to an EPA memo uncovered by FOX 8.

The memo, dated May 17, 2019 -- just 11 days before crews dug up radioactive material from beneath a Gert Town road and placed it into bins. In it, the federal government stated the site on Lowerline Street was a threat to public health, welfare and the environment, and removal would be the appropriate action, due to the actual or potential exposure to humans, animals and the food chain from hazardous substances, pollutants or contaminants.

The Department of Energy discovered the contaminant, Radium-226, more than six years ago, during security sweeps for the 2013 Super Bowl

Attorney Madro Bandaries is representing hundreds of people in a class action lawsuit against the city and the remediation company initially hired to remove the material and said he was shocked by the documents FOX 8 uncovered.

"I've read over 8,000 pages of documents we have received through FOIA requests from different agencies, this is the most shocking thing I've seen," Bandaries said. "I would suggest that FOX 8 put this on their website immediately and let the people of New Orleans if they are in danger from the Gert Town matter or not."

FOX 8 uncovered an EPA memo addressing the dangerous levels of radium found underneath a Gert Town street ()

The memo also states the Radium-226 exposure rate was several times higher than the EPA acceptable exposure limit, reporting:

“In fact, the annual dose allowable for the general public can be exceeded at levels at the street or adjacent areas in less than one hour per day.”

Another concern cited in the EPA document states crews working on the utilities or road could receive a dose exceeding the annual allowable general public dose within minutes. And, the activity is high enough that a trained and medically monitored radiation worker is in danger of exceeding the annual allowable dose.

“These documents are from a U.S. government agency that lay out the dangers that they found,” Bandaries said.

What’s more, the EPA expressed concerns about the Radium-226 migrating due to rain or wind. While the federal government said the radiation did not migrate upward -- as would happen when water infiltrates the soil during rain events -- the EPA said there were concerns the Radium-226 could degrade into radon gas, which could get under homes in the area and result in unhealthy exposures to residents.

According to the CDC, radon is a gas you can’t smell or see, and it’s the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S.

“I hate the use of the term smoking gun, this is the gun, it’s so amazing,” Bandaries said. “You don’t have to be a physicist or anything to read this, this is in straight forward English. It’s saying, there is a problem, the United States government says there was a problem, and it puts everybody in Gert Town at risk.”

FOX 8 reached out to both the city and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality about the memo. In an emailed statement, LDEQ Press Secretary Greg Langley said:

“I haven’t seen the memo your referenced in your email, and I will not comment on it.

The City of New Orleans reiterated a statement it issued June 30, 2019:

“EPA assumed oversight of project operations. The City has been in constant communication with federal and state partners to push for safe and expedient removal and these agencies have been continually monitoring and have not reported any increased risk to the public during removal... For further questions or concerns about the removal, call EPA Region 6 External Affairs at (214) 665-2200 or r6press@epa.gov”

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